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PROFILE

Chad Ryan, sales & leasing associate,
Platinum Properties

Ryan sets the stage for his second act

By LIANA GREY

Several weeks ago, Chad Ryan brought a client to 56 Pine Street, a condominium conversion in the financial district.

When he stepped off the elevator on the third floor, he noticed a huge arch in the amenities lounge. The 15-story brick, stone, and terracotta tower is over a century old, and once housed bank offices and a club — the kind where middle age men sit around smoking cigars. “I want to know more about that building,” he said.

When Ryan makes a comment like this, it's more than just in passing: long before he got his real estate license, the Platinum Properties broker was slipping into historic buildings to take photographs — some for a coffee table book he hopes to publish within the next few years.

It all began in September 2006, when Ryan, who was raised in Chicago and studied theater at the University of Northern Iowa, moved to New York to audition for Broadway shows. Casting calls were held at five in the morning, and required standing in line with thousands of other Broadway hopefuls. “The people that see those actors audition are interns,” Ryan said.

He landed a role as principle swing, or understudy, for two shows — *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Phantom of the Opera* — and wound up on stage as the title characters for

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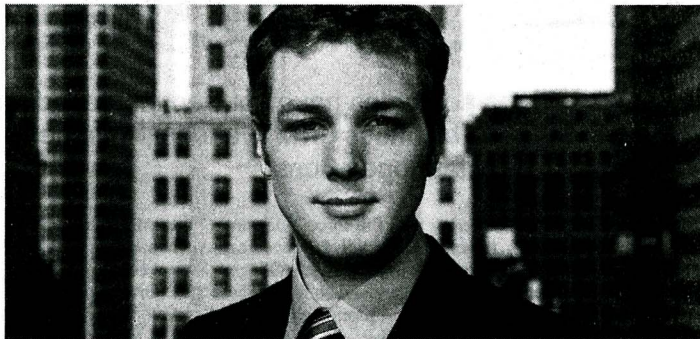
both; later, he sang numbers from the latter at Carnegie Hall alongside the New York Pops Orchestra. He also performed in Philadelphia, Dallas, and other smaller cities, starring in *Once Upon a Mattress*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, and 14 different productions of *Oklahoma*.

In his spare time, Ryan borrowed a wide-lens camera from his uncle, an amateur photographer, and began documenting historic theaters for a book on Broadway's architectural past. There are 42 playhouses near Times Square, and Ryan is almost done photographing them; after recovering from a setback (his computer crashed, taking with it dozens of photos) he is in the process of seeking an agent for the book.

One of the buildings, the Stephen Sondheim, is about to shut down. “The theater is one of the oldest on Broadway,” Ryan said. About 80 years ago, it was transformed into a nightclub, then an X-rated movie theater. “It became totally abandoned,” Ryan said. “Homeless people and pigeons lived in it.” One day, a producer walked past the dilapidated brick structure, with its dramatic neo-classical columns and peaked roofs, and decided it would be perfect for the staging of *Cabaret*.

The building was demolished in 2004, shortly after a three-year run of *Urinetown*, a musical comedy. Its history is not entirely unique. “Most Broadway theaters have housed X-rated movie theaters,” Ryan said. One thing these cavernous auditoriums haven't become, however, is luxury condominiums. They aren't as easy to carve up, perhaps, as former office towers like 56 Pine Street, where Ryan is now helping his client close on an apartment.

But many midtown auditoriums sit below apartment complexes that were occupied, in the middle of last century, by theater proprietors. One installed a trapdoor in his



living room, Ryan said, which was positioned directly over the stage. When his wife, an actress, was selected to star in a show, he would watch her perform through the floor, and would wave a white flag to alert her when she was overacting.

Hooked on uncovering colorful tidbits of the city's past, Ryan moved on to structures elsewhere in Manhattan, including the New York Stock Exchange, the Castle in Central Park, which is used as a weather station for local television channels, and the labyrinth of service tunnels beneath the Empire State Building.

Hundreds of tourists train their lenses on buildings like these each day; to get original shots, Ryan did whatever it took to access their interiors. In the case of the Broadway theaters, that meant calling managers for permission and leveraging his connections in the industry: he is a member of an actor's union, and auditions for six or seven major roles each year.

At the New York Stock Exchange and other landmarks downtown, Ryan settled for taking pictures from the sidewalk; security clearance procedures were too time-consuming.

Residential buildings were a whole different story. Sometimes, the only way Ryan could get inside was if he posed as a real estate professional. “I became an agent because I noticed the easiest way to get into buildings was to be a broker,” he said. And the relatively flexible hours didn't hurt. “This is the best job in the world to have as an actor,” he said.

Until last year, Ryan waited tables at the Ellen Stardust Diner, a tourist hot spot on 51st Street and Broadway that hires singers and actors, including Tony nominees, to perform for costumers. “Everyone had their signature song,” Ryan said. “I did *Phantom of the Opera*,” with a comedic twist: he wrapped toilet paper around his head to evoke the *Phantom's* mask.

Just before quitting his job at the diner, he spent three weeks showing \$1,000 Harlem studios to clients with low budgets. Last April, he joined Platinum Proper-

ties, Khashy Eyn's steadily expanding boutique firm, where he was able to devote his attention to a single client for weeks at a time. “I would rather spend a lot of time with a high-end client,” he said.

His roster includes Wall Street executives and students with wealthy parents. Up in midtown, Ryan said, it's not that difficult to rent a \$2,000 studio to a college-age client; he spent much of last summer doing exactly that at 505 West 37th Street, a luxury tower built by TF Cornerstone.

Whenever he can, he helps actors hunt for homes. “They're fun to work with because we get each other,” Ryan said. “That's important for real estate agents: you need things in common with your clients.”

Recently, he helped Adam Storke, who starred opposite Julia Roberts in the romantic comedy *Mystic Pizza*, close on a dream apartment with wooden floors, high ceilings, and arched windows. “He wanted a beautiful loft in TriBeCa,” Ryan said. “We found it — in the Financial District.”

In these neighborhoods, surprisingly enough, the luxury buildings that sell quickest tend to have unassuming exteriors. It's all a matter of expectation: “Inside, they really blow you away,” Ryan said.

Lofts in TriBeCa can be particularly deceiving. When Ryan met a client on West Broadway and Murray Street one day, the house hunter assumed that he would be visiting a glass and steel luxury tower on the corner of the street. (Ryan does have a handful of listings like this, including a three-bedroom, three-and-a-half-bath mansion in the sky on the 54th story of a recently constructed TriBeCa high-rise. Monthly rent: \$25,208.)

Instead, the client toured a seemingly rundown brick building — with breathtaking interiors. “Never judge a book by its cover in real estate,” Ryan said.